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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY 1323  
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SUVA 000460

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)  
SUBJECT: FIJI'S CIVIL-MILITARY CRISIS AT A TIPPING POINT?

REF: A. SUVA 444 (AND PREVIOUS)  
[1](#)B. USDAO SUVA 180007Z OCT 06

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

#### Summary

[1](#)1. (S) Fiji President Iloilo is being asked to endorse suspension of Republic of Fiji Military Forces (RFMF) Commander Bainimarama and to name an interim replacement. The context is "advanced preparations" for a coup, that could take place as early as late this week, according to Fiji's Police Commissioner Hughes. Bainimarama is currently on a visit to the MidEast. A shipment of ammunition arrived in Suva last weekend, and Hughes has so far blocked the RFMF from receiving it. RFMF reserves have been ordered to report for duty on Nov. 2, purportedly a routine operation. We comment that how Iloilo will act is crucial, but not clear. How the RFMF and the Fiji public would react to a coup order is similarly not completely knowable. The Embassy is exercising emergency procedures, just in case; and we have issued a warden notice for Americans to take care. We seek Washington and PACOM guidance whether an invitation for Bainimarama to attend the annual CHODS conference in KL should be rescinded. End summary.

#### President asked to endorse Bainimarama suspension

[1](#)2. (S) According to Fiji Police Commissioner Hughes, Prime Minister Qarase has presented Vice President Madraiwiwi an order for President Iloilo to endorse that would suspend RFMF Commander Bainimarama and install Col. Meli Saubulinayau as Acting Commander. Madraiwiwi is to meet with Iloilo today, Tuesday, Oct. 31, to try to convince him to sign. If Iloilo does chop, the leadership changes would be effective immediately. Col. Meli reportedly has agreed to implement once the President signs, and he believes he can win over his RFMF colleagues.

#### Reportedly "advanced preparations" for a coup

[1](#)3. (S) Per reftels, Bainimarama has ratcheted up civil-military tensions in recent weeks. Hughes told us police informants in the RFMF are certain "advanced preparations" are under way for a coup that could take place as early as this week. Nov. 2 is reportedly the sixth anniversary of a failed mutiny within the RFMF that followed the coup of 2000 and threatened Bainimarama's life. Nov. 3 is the opening of Parliament's budget session. Past Fiji coups have been initiated with takeovers of Parliament.

#### Bainimarama on his way to Iraq

14. (S) Bainimarama remains on overseas travel. He is due to enter Iraq from Kuwait on Nov. 2 and is expected back in Fiji on Nov. 8. In the past, he has shown a propensity to want to be visibly in charge at key moments, which would suggest any RFMF move might not take place until after the 8th. However, the reported advanced preparations by RFMF senior officers leave open an earlier scenario.

#### Police Commissioner makes contingency plans

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15. (S) Hughes told us he has already prepared sealed orders to be dispensed throughout the police force if a coup takes place and he (Hughes) is displaced. The Police are not to resist the RFMF initially. That would be futile. They are to hunker down, attempt to maintain basic public order, wait for inevitable cracks to form in whatever mechanism Bainimarama would install, and then help organize efforts to bring Fiji back to constitutional government.

#### Police v. RFMF on ammo shipment

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16. (S) Fiji media have reported that Police Commissioner Hughes has denied RFMF access to a container load of ammunition that arrived at the Suva wharf from Korea last weekend. Hughes said publicly it would be "irresponsible" to release the shipment absent assurances from RFMF leadership that the ammo would not be used to destabilize the government. Hughes told us he made the call on his own, wanting to be able to justify his actions if some future accountability review board calls him to testify; but he said the Qarase Government has not objected to his stance. An RFMF source informed us that Bainimarama has advised not to force the issue as yet. When an RFMF contingent went to the

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wharf with its paperwork Oct. 30, Police declined to release the shipment and the RFMF troops left quietly.

#### Calling in the reserves

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17. (C) The RFMF has publicly announced that all 3000 of its territorial (reserve) forces are to march into camps on Nov. 2 in what is billed as a routine, annual training exercise. Such exercises have taken place in the past, the last one just a year ago; however, given the current tensions, the public sees the timing as ominous.

#### Comment

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18. (S) President Iloilo is "Commander in Chief." If he takes a stand and signs Qarase's documents, RFMF senior officers would clearly be acting treasonously if they opposed. Col. Meli is highly respected within the RFMF, so he is a good choice as interim replacement. A key issue in this scenario is Iloilo's will. If Iloilo does not go along, word will reach Bainimarama rapidly, and he may well be even more determined to act against Qarase.

19. (S) How much loyalty Bainimarama can depend on within the RFMF is an open question, as is how much enthusiasm there would be for a coup in the broader community. Qarase, an ethnic Fijian, won well over 80 percent of the vote among ethnic Fijians in last May's elections. The RFMF is almost entirely made up of ethnic Fijians. It has seemed that a large majority of the populace has been enthusiastic about the multi-party cabinet that Qarase has engineered. On the other hand, there are significant groupings that believe Qarase caters too much to Fijian "nationalists," that allege significant corruption, and that disapprove of controversial bills before Parliament.

110. (SBU) The Embassy has been exercising its emergency procedures, just in case. With CA advice, we revised our Consular Information Sheet and issued a warden notice last week that highlights increased tensions that could result in unrest and that urges American citizens to be careful.

Action query

11. (S) Commodore Bainimarama has accepted a PACOM invitation to travel to Kuala Lumpur, at USG expense, for the annual PACOM CHODS conference, departing Suva Nov. 12. Given his recent anti-democratic activities in Fiji, we request that Washington and PACOM consider rescinding that invitation for this year. The Aussies High Commission in Suva indicated they favor rescinding. If the proposed suspension takes place or if a coup takes place, the invitation to Bainimarama would not be appropriate. An invitation to the replacement would be OK, though the atmosphere in Fiji might make such a trip doubtful. If a stalemate continues, the CHODS trip for Bainimarama would send very unfortunate signals to pro-democracy elements in Fiji, who need all the encouragement we can provide.

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